

~Other Speakers S-Z: Classic Christian Writings:

“He said unto them, which of you shall have a friend, and shall go to him at midnight, and say to him, friend, lend me three loaves, for a friend of mine is come to me from a journey, and I have nothing to set before him; and he from within shall answer and say, trouble me not: the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give thee. I say unto you, though he will not rise and give him because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him as many as he needeth” (Luke 11:5-8).

Jesus gives the beautiful parable of the friend at midnight, to teach His disciples the twofold lesson that God does not only want us to pray for ourselves, but for the perishing around us, and that in such intercession, great boldness of entreaty is often needful and always lawful, yes, pleasing to God.

The parable is a perfect storehouse of instruction in regard to true intercession. There is first, the love which seeks to help the needy around us: “My friend is come to me.” Then the need which urges to the cry: “I have nothing to set before him.” Then follows the confidence that help is to be had: “Which of you shall have a friend and say, Friend, lend me three loaves.” Then comes the unexpected refusal, “I cannot rise and give thee.” Then again the perseverance that takes no refusal: “because of his importunity.” Lastly, the reward of such prayer: “He will give him as many as he needeth.” A wonderful setting forth of the way of prayer and faith in which the blessing of God has so often been sought and found.

Let us confine ourselves to the chief thought: prayer as an appeal to the friendship of God. We shall find that two lessons are especially suggested. The one, that if we are God’s friends and come as such to Him, we must prove ourselves the friends of the needy. God’s friendship to us and ours to others go hand in hand. The other, that when we come thus we may use the utmost liberty in claiming an answer.

There is a twofold use of prayer: the one, to obtain strength and blessing for our own life. The other is the higher, the true glory of prayer, for which Christ has taken us into His fellowship and teaching. It is intercession, where prayer is the royal power a child of God exercises in heaven on behalf of others and even of the Kingdom. We see it in Scripture, how it was in intercession for others that Abraham and Moses, Samuel and Elijah, with all the holy men of old, proved that they had power with God and prevailed.

It is when we give ourselves to be a blessing that we can especially count on the blessing of God. It is when we draw near to God as the friend of the poor and the perishing that we may count on His friendliness. The righteous man who is the friend of the poor is very especially the friend of God. This gives wonderful liberty in prayer.

“Lord! I have a needy friend whom I must help. As a friend I have undertaken to help him. In Thee I have a Friend, whose kindness and riches I know to be infinite. I am sure Thou wilt give me what I ask. If I, being evil, am ready to do for my friend what I can, how much more wilt Thou, O my heavenly Friend, now do for Thy friend what he asks?”

The question might suggest itself, whether the fatherhood of God does not give such confidence in prayer that the thought of His friendship can hardly teach us anything more. A father is more than a friend. Yet, if we consider it, this pleading the friendship of God opens new wonders to us. That a child obtains what he asks of his father looks so perfectly natural, we almost count it the father’s duty to give. But with a friend it is as if the kindness is more free, dependent, not on the nature, but on sympathy and character.

Then, the relation of a child is more that of perfect dependence. Two friends are more nearly on a level. So our Lord, in seeking to unfold to us the spiritual mystery of prayer, would have us approach God in this relation too, as those whom He acknowledged as His friends, whose mind and life are in sympathy with His.

But we must be living as His friends. I am still a child even when a wanderer, but friendship depends upon the conduct. “Ye are My friends if ye do whatsoever I command you” (John 15:14). “Thou seest that faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect; and the scripture was fulfilled which saith, and Abraham believed God...and he was called the friend of God” (James 2:22-23).

It is the Spirit “the same Spirit,” that leads us that also bears witness to our acceptance with God. “Likewise, also,” the same Spirit helps us in prayer. It is a life as the friend of God that gives the wonderful liberty to say: I have a friend to whom I can go even at midnight. How much more when I go in the very spirit of that friendliness, manifesting myself the very kindness I look for in God, seeking to help my friend as I want

God to help me.

When I come to God in prayer, He always looks to what the aim is of my petition. If it be merely for my own comfort or joy I see His grace, I do not receive. But if I can say that it is that He may be glorified in my dispensing His blessings to others, I shall not ask in vain. Or if I ask for others, but want to wait until God has made me so rich, that it is no sacrifice or act of faith to aid them, I shall not obtain.

But if I can say that I have already undertaken for my needy friend, that in my poverty I have already begun the work of love, because I knew I had a friend who would help me, my prayer will be heard. Oh, we know not how much the plea avails! The friendship of earth looking in its need to the friendship of heaven: **“He will give him as much as he needeth.”**

But not always at once. The one thing by which man can honor and enjoy his God is faith. Intercession is part of faith’s training school. There our friendship with men and with God is tested. There it is seen whether my friendship with the needy is so real, that I will take time and sacrifice my rest, will go even at midnight and not cease until I have obtained for them what I need. There it is seen whether my friendship with God is so clear, that I can depend on Him not to turn me away and therefore pray on until He gives.

O what a deep heavenly mystery this is of persevering prayer. The God who has promised, who longs, whose fixed purpose it is to give the blessing, holds it back. It is to Him a matter of such deep importance that His friends on earth should know and fully trust their rich Friend in heaven. He trains them, in the school of answer delayed, to find out how their perseverance really does prevail, and what the mighty power is they can wield in heaven if they do but set themselves to do it.

There is a faith that sees the promise and embraces it, and yet does not receive it (Heb. 11:13,39). It is when the answer to prayer does not come, and the promise we are most firmly trusting appears to be of none effect, that the trial of faith, more precious than gold, takes place. It is in this trial that the faith that has embraced the promise is purified and strengthened and prepared in personal, holy fellowship with the living God, to see the glory of God. It takes and holds the promise until it has received the fulfillment of what it had claimed in a living truth in the unseen but living God.

Let each child of God who is seeking to work the work of love in his Father’s service take courage. The parent with his child, the teacher with his class, the visitor with his district, the Bible reader with his circle, the preacher with his hearers, each one who, in his little circle, has accepted and is bearing the burden of hungry, perishing souls—let them all take courage. Nothing is at first so strange to us as that God should really require persevering prayer, that there should be a real spiritual needs-be for importunity. To teach it to us, the Master uses this almost strange parable. If the unfriendliness of a selfish earthly friend can be conquered by importunity, how much more will it avail with the heavenly Friend, who does so love to give, but is held back by our spiritual unfitness, our incapacity to possess what He has to give.

O let us thank Him that in delaying His answer He is educating us up to our true position and the exercise of all our power with Him, training us to live with Him in the fellowship of undoubting faith and trust, to be indeed the friends of God. Let us hold fast the threefold cord that cannot be broken: the hungry friend needing the help, and the praying friend seeking the help, and the Mighty Friend, loving to give as much as he needeth.

“O my Blessed Lord and Teacher! I must come to Thee in prayer. Thy teaching is so glorious, and yet too high for me to grasp. I must confess that my heart is too little to take in these thoughts of the wonderful boldness I may use with Thy Father as my Friend. Lord Jesus, I trust Thee to give me Thy Spirit with Thy Word, and to make the Word quick and powerful in my heart. I desire to keep Thy Word of this day: “Because of his importunity he will give him as many as he needeth.”

Lord, teach me more to know the power of persevering prayer. I know that in it the Father suits Himself to our need of time for the inner life to attain its growth and ripeness, so that His grace may indeed be assimilated and made our very own. I know that He would thus train us to the exercise of that strong faith that does not let Him go even in the face of seeming disappointment. I know He wants to lift us to that wonderful liberty, in which we understand how really He has made the dispensing of His gift dependent on our prayer. Lord, I know this: O teach me to see it in spirit and truth.

May it now be the joy of my life to become the dispenser of the riches of my rich Friend in heaven, to care for all the hungry and perishing, even at midnight, because I know my Friend, who always gives to him

The Boldness Of God's Friends (With Christ In The School Of Prayer) By Andrew Murray

who perseveres, because of his importunity, as many as he needeth.